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ELIMINATION OF RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Letter dated 10 June 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As you know, at the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights, held this spring at Geneva, the Palestinian Observer delegate made the hideous, and patently false, charge that during the "Intifada" period, Israel injected 300 Palestinian children with the HIV (AIDS) virus. This calumny is reminiscent of the notorious "blood libel" raised by anti-semites against Jews over the centuries and is, in fact, a vicious form of present-day anti-semitism at the State level. It was rejected out of hand by the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

I am sure you will agree that racist remarks of this or any kind have no place at the United Nations. Thus, we were encouraged to learn that during a meeting with Presidents of major Jewish organizations in New York on 31 March 1997 you expressed your view that whenever unsubstantiated allegations of this nature were made at United Nations meetings, the speaker should be called to order.

Regrettably, this did not happen in the Commission on Human Rights, and hence the Palestinian Observer's libel still stands on the record. We would therefore request you to examine what steps can be taken to correct the record, including the possibility of deleting the offensive remarks in question. The matter is of importance because, if uncorrected, the allegations may take on a dynamic and an assumed validity of their own, with the imprimatur of the United Nations.

* A/52/50.

In the meantime, I attach a copy of a forthright letter dated 21 March 1997 from the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights to the Israeli Ambassador in Geneva on this unfortunate affair. As you will see, the Chairman strongly rejects the Palestinian Observer's form of argumentation.

I would request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 112 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) David PELEG
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

ANNEX

Letter dated 21 March 1997 from the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-third session addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Thank you very much for your letter dated 17 March 1997 relating to a statement made at the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights. I fully understand your concern as to the charge made against your country by the Palestinian Observer, Ambassador Ramlawi, in his statement delivered on 11 March 1997, saying that 300 Palestinian children had been recently injected by Israel with the HIV (AIDS) virus.

As Chairman of the current session of the Commission and representative of a country protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and a fair political dialogue, I share your feeling about such a serious allegation made without evidence on the basis of a newspaper article. From the context of the situation and information generally available I assume that the speaker should be aware of the fact that these allegations have been proved completely false.

This unfortunate case reminds me of a very similar allegation made towards your country in 1991 in the Commission on Human Rights. Already at that time, my predecessor, the Chairman of the forty-seventh session of the Commission, expressed the conviction that declarations provoking racist or discriminatory sentiments must not be tolerated in the Commission.

I fully share this opinion and personally strongly reject such a way of argumentation in the discussions of the Commission. It is my view that a statement of that kind cannot remain without an appropriate reaction.

As requested, your letter has been circulated as a document of the Commission (E/CN.4/1997/122). I have arranged with the secretariat for my reply to your letter to be circulated as a document of the Commission as well.

(Signed) Miroslav SOMOL
Chairman of the fifty-third session
of the Commission on Human Rights